

Chicago area now almost majority minority

 chicagobusiness.com/article/20170705/BLOGS02/170709972/chicago-area-now-almost-majority-minority

Greg Hinz on
Politics



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Metropolitan Chicago is just a few years from becoming majority non-white, even as African-Americans flee the region, and the city of Chicago becomes whiter and richer.

That's the bottom line of a new analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning that does a pretty fair job of pulling together in one understandable package individual sets of figures that have received some media coverage but that collectively approach being jaw-dropping.

The topline of the ["Socioeconomic Shifts in the Chicago Region"](#) report is that between 2005 and 2016, the seven-county region moved from 55 percent white to 51 percent white, with the metro area adding 440,000 residents of color, while whites left—200,000 of them in suburban Cook County alone. That builds on an earlier drop from 58 percent white to 53 percent [previously reported by CMAP](#).

If those trends continue—neither CMAP nor other demographers I consulted know of any major reason they won't—the area will be majority minority "within five years," said CMAP research director Liz Schuh, the principal author of the study. It's even possible the shift could occur by the time of the 2020 census, Schuh said.

If you drill down into that macro number, though, all sorts of interesting things are happening.

The city lost 104,000 African-American residents, with only some moving to the suburbs. "Those trends suggest that black residents from Chicago are choosing to leave the region altogether," mostly for Sun Belt cities, the report says.

That's consistent with findings by Metropolitan Planning Council researcher Alden Loury, who [in a recent report](#) specifically examined what's happening in Chicago proper. The loss is focused among low-income households, Loury added, and is much bigger than in most other major metros.

The population of whites here has dropped, too, down almost 200,000 in the seven counties as a whole, according to census data crunched by CMAP. But not in Chicago.

In the city, largely in the booming central area and nearby neighborhoods, the white population is up almost 60,000 even as almost twice as many blacks left. The Hispanic population also is growing in both the city and suburbs, though not nearly as quickly as it was a decade ago. The fastest percentage growth is among Asians, although from a fairly small base.

"Chicago's growth is relying now on whites, growing at 6,000 per year," Chicago demographer Rob Paral told me after examining the CMAP data. "Really a remarkable change."

However, the biggest news may be economic: Lower-income people are leaving the city and to a lesser degree the region, replaced by higher-income groups.

For instance, among whites in the region, the number of households earning less than \$50,000 a year dropped almost 150,000, and the number earning \$50,000 to \$99,999 declined more than 100,000. But the number of households earning more than \$100,000 a year soared by more than 200,000. That loss of the middle-class phenomenon [has popped up in other data](#), but rarely that clearly.

The same trends generally are true among other ethnic groups. The data have not been adjusted for inflation, but Schuh said inflation has been so slow in the past decade that there was little "bracket creep" because of inflation.

[Another CMAP report issued a few weeks ago](#) suggested that population decline here is focused among families with children, with single-person households continuing to grow at a good clip.